

Bible Study July 23, 2025

MATTHEW 6 (NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION)

Giving to the Needy

¹ “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

² “So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.

The term hypocrites does not apply to people who try to do good but fall short. Instead, it refers to people who do good for insincere reasons, perhaps for personal gain or to enhance their reputations, not out of compassion or genuine care for others. Hypocrites say one thing to others in order to make themselves look good while believing something completely different in their hearts. The attention they may get is their only reward. Ironically, those with sincere faith, who do good deeds out of a genuine love for God and other people with no expectation of getting anything in return, will receive far greater rewards from God.

³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,

When Jesus says not to let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, he is teaching that our motives for giving to God and to others must be pure. It is easy to give with mixed motives, to do something for someone if it will benefit us in return. But believers should avoid all scheming and give for the pleasure of giving and as a response to God's love. Why do you give?

⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Acts of kindness are easier to do when we gain recognition and praise. To be sure our motives are not selfish, we should do our good deeds quietly or in secret, with no thought of reward. Jesus says we should check our motives in three areas: generosity (6:4), prayer (6:6), and fasting (6:18). Those acts should not be self-centered but God-centered, done not to make us look good but to make God look good. The reward God promises is not necessarily material or temporal; it may be spiritual or eternal. And it is never given to those who give, pray, or fast simply to get a reward or praise from others. With your next act of kindness, ask, Would I still do this if no one would ever know I did it?

Prayer

⁵ “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and

pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Some people, especially the religious leaders, wanted to be seen as holy, and public prayer was one way to get attention. Jesus saw through their self-righteous acts, however, and taught that the essence of prayer is not public style but private communication with God. There is a place for public prayer, but to pray only where others will notice you indicates that your real audience is not God.

Some have concluded that Jesus' directions about private prayer call into question all public prayer. Jesus' own practice indicates this wasn't his intention. The Gospels record Jesus at prayer both privately (14:23) and publicly (14:18-19). Jesus was drawing attention to the motives behind people's actions. The point really wasn't a choice between public and private prayer but between heartfelt and hypocritical prayer. When asked to pray in public, focus on addressing God, not on how you're coming across to others

⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Repeating the same words over and over like a magic incantation does not guarantee that God will hear your prayer any better. It's not wrong to come to God many times with the same requests—Jesus encourages persistent prayer (Luke 18:1-8). But he condemns the shallow repetition of words that are not offered with a sincere heart. We can never pray too much if our prayers are honest and sincere. When you pray, keep your heart and mind actively engaged. Make sure you mean what you say.

⁹ “This, then, is how you should pray:

***“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,***

This is often called the Lord's Prayer because Jesus gave it to the disciples as a model for all his followers to use as we pray. Jesus provided this prayer as a pattern to be imitated as well as taught to others. We should praise God, pray for his work in the world, pray for our daily needs, pray for forgiveness, and pray for help in our daily struggles. You can use the words of the Lord's Prayer to guide your own prayer times. With each line you can add your own words of praise and your personal requests.

“Our Father in heaven” indicates that God is not only majestic and holy but also personal and loving. Jesus calls God Father ten times in this teaching passage. Here he fully establishes that his new movement would be both a community and a family because people and relationships are so important to him. He even began his ministry by calling two brothers, Simon and Andrew, to follow him (4:18-20). In addition to reminding us that we are part of God's family, the first line of Jesus' prayer asks us to lift our hearts and minds to praise God and to keep holy (honor) his name. No ministry or enterprise undertaken in God's name should disgrace him by being unjust, exploitative, or abusive. We honor God's name by using it respectfully, not flippantly. We must listen to what he says and reach out to all people with his love.

**¹⁰ your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.**

“May your Kingdom come soon” refers to God’s spiritual reign, not Israel’s freedom from Rome. God’s Kingdom was announced in the covenant with Abraham (8:11; Luke 13:28), is demonstrated by Christ’s reign in believers’ hearts (Luke 17:21), and will be complete when all evil is destroyed and God establishes the new heaven and new earth (Revelation 21:1). We can pray that God will rule now in this broken world and that he will overturn the hostile governments and anti-God perspectives that bring division and suffering today.

When we pray, May your will be done, we are not passively resigning ourselves to fate but requesting that God will accomplish his perfect purpose in this world as well as in the next. And how does God accomplish his will on earth? He does it mainly through his willing followers. When we pray this part of the prayer, we offer ourselves as God’s available servants, asking him to guide us, lead us, and give us the means to accomplish his purposes.

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.

When we pray, Give us today the food we need, we acknowledge God as our sustainer and provider. He gives us physical strength, wisdom, courage, and the Holy Spirit to lead us each day. As we pray this prayer, we confess that we did not create ourselves and that we are not self-sufficient. We must trust God daily to provide what he knows we need.

**¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.**

**¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.’**

Everyone faces temptation. As Jesus’ disciples, we can ask God to deliver us from these trying times and to protect us from Satan (“the evil one”) and his deceitful schemes. All Christians struggle with temptation. Sometimes the temptation is so subtle that we don’t even realize what is happening to us. God has promised that he won’t allow us to be tempted beyond what we can stand but will always provide a way out so we can endure (1 Corinthians 10:13). Ask God to help you recognize temptation, to give you strength to overcome it, and to choose his way instead. (For more on temptation, see the note on Matthew 4:1.)

¹⁴ For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Jesus gives a startling warning about forgiveness: If we refuse to forgive others, God will also refuse to forgive us. Why? Because by not forgiving others, we deny our common ground as sinners in need of God’s forgiveness and we break the family relationship God wants us to have with all people. Our salvation from sin is not based on our forgiving others, but we can’t receive God’s forgiveness until we realize what forgiveness really means (see Ephesians 4:32). We can

easily ask God for forgiveness for ourselves but then hang on to grudges toward others who are difficult to forgive. Whenever we ask God to forgive us for sin, we should first ask ourselves if we have forgiven the people who have wronged us.

Fasting

¹⁶ “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.

Fasting—going without food in order to spend time in prayer—is noble and difficult. It gives us time to pray, teaches us self-discipline, reminds us that we can live with a lot less, and helps us appreciate God’s gifts. Jesus was condemning not fasting but hypocrisy—fasting in order to gain public approval. Fasting was mandatory for the Jewish people once a year, on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:32). The Pharisees also voluntarily fasted twice a week to impress the people with their “holiness.” Jesus commended acts of self-sacrifice done quietly and sincerely. He wanted people to adopt spiritual disciplines for the right reasons, not from a selfish desire for praise.

¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Treasures in Heaven

¹⁹ “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

Jesus expanded his teaching beyond activities we sometimes consider only religious, like prayer and fasting, to a wider variety of daily pressures and concerns. Storing treasures in heaven is not limited to tithing but includes all acts of service to God. Giving our money to God’s work is like investing in heaven because it helps more people hear and respond to the Good News. We should seek to please God both in our giving and in our fulfilling of God’s purposes in everything else we do.

²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Jesus made it clear that storing our treasures in the wrong place leads to our hearts being in the wrong place. What we treasure the most controls us, whether we admit it or not. What we think about, talk about, or spend our money on can dominate us. If possessions or money become too important to us, we must reestablish control of our hearts. We need to get rid of the things that have become idols to us. Jesus calls for a decision to live contentedly with whatever we have because we have chosen eternal values over temporary, earthly treasures.

²² “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. ²³ But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

Having good spiritual vision means having the capacity to see clearly what God wants us to do and to see the world from his point of view. This perspective can be easily obscured by self-

serving desires, interests, and goals. Serving God is the best way to restore it. A healthy eye stays fixed on God.

24 “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

Jesus says we can have only one master. We live in a materialistic society where many people serve money. They spend their lives collecting and storing it, only to die and leave it behind. Their desire for money and what it can buy far outweighs their commitment to God and what he values. Whatever you store up, you will spend much of your time and energy thinking about. Don't fall into the materialistic trap, because “the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil” (1 Timothy 6:10). Can you honestly say that God, and not money, is your master? One test is to ask yourself which one occupies more of your thoughts, time, and efforts.

Jesus contrasted heavenly values with earthly values when he explained that our first loyalty should be to those things that do not fade, cannot be stolen or used up, and never wear out. We should not be fascinated with our possessions, lest they possess us. God alone deserves to be our master. Either we store our treasures with God (6:20-21), focus our “eyes” on him (6:22-23), and serve him alone, or else we do not serve him at all. Where does your ultimate allegiance lie?

Do Not Worry

25 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?

Because of the ill effects of worry, Jesus tells us not to worry about the needs that God promises to supply. Worry may (1) damage your health, (2) disrupt your productivity, (3) negatively affect the way you treat others, (4) rob your day of joy, and (5) reduce your ability to trust in God. How many ill effects of worry are you experiencing? Here is the difference between worry and genuine concern: Worry immobilizes you, but concern moves you to action.

26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

28 “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

To “seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously” means to put God first in your life, to fill your thoughts with his desires, to use his character as your life's pattern, and to keep on implementing his Kingdom values on earth. What is really important to you? People, objects,

goals, and other desires all compete for priority. Any of these can quickly become most important to you if you don't actively choose to give God first place in every area of your life. In Jesus' Kingdom, worrying about daily needs leaves us empty. But maintaining a good relationship with him and loving others give us all these benefits as by-products.

³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Time devoted to planning for tomorrow is time well spent; time devoted to worrying about tomorrow is time wasted. Sometimes it's difficult to tell the difference. Careful planning is thinking ahead about goals, steps, and schedules, and trusting in God's guidance. When done well, planning helps alleviate worry. Worrying, by contrast, consumes us with anxiety and makes it difficult for us to trust God. Worriers let their obsession with plans and outcomes interfere with their relationship with God. Don't let worries about tomorrow affect your relationship with God today.